

176 731

OUR NATIONAL SORROW.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

CONTAINING THE SUBSTANCE OF TWO SERMONS

DELIVERED IN THE

Presbyterian Church, Johnstown,

APRIL 16 AND 19, 1865.

BY

REV. DANIEL STEWART, D. D.



JOHNSTOWN:
J. D. HOUGHTALING, PRINTER.
1865.

OUR NATIONAL SORROW.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

CONTAINING THE SUBSTANCE OF TWO SERMONS

DELIVERED IN THE

Presbyterian Church, Johnstown,

APRIL 16 AND 19, 1865.

BY

REV. DANIEL STEWART, D. D.



JOHNSTOWN :

J. D. HOUGHTALING, PRINTER.

1865.

JOHNSTOWN, April 20, 1865.

REV. D. STEWART—

DEAR SIR:—At the close of the public services to-day at the Presbyterian Church, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to solicit for publication a copy of your Discourse delivered on the occasion, and also a copy of your Sermon on our great National bereavement, last Sabbath morning.

In discharging their duty, the Committee take pleasure in assuring you that, in common with all your hearers, they were deeply impressed with your discourses, and fully concur in the judgment very generally and emphatically expressed, that they ought to be placed in a permanent form, both for the benefit of your auditors, and others who had not the pleasure of listening to them. We respectfully request, therefore, that you will gratify the public by consenting to their publication.

Respectfully and Truly Yours,

FRANCIS BURDICK,
DAVID A. WELLS,
H. E. SMITH.


MESSRS. BURDICK, WELLS and SMITH—

GENTLEMEN:—I do not feel myself at liberty to consult my own judgment, nor to follow my own preferences in the matter of your request. Believing that much of the interest you attribute to these hastily written Discourses, is due, in a large degree to the state of the public mind produced by our great National Bereavement, I yet comply with your wish in the main. I have deemed it best to throw together the substance of both discourses under one text, rather than to give the Sermons in their original form.

Yours, Very Truly,

DANL. STEWART.

JOHNSTOWN, N. Y., May 1st, 1865.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

DISCOURSE.

LAMENTATIONS 5: 15. "THE JOY OF OUR HEART IS CEASED: OUR DANCE IS TURNED INTO MOURNING."

This day which calls us together to pour out our lamentations over a great national calamity, was set apart by official proclamation as an occasion for joy and thanksgiving in view of national triumphs.* The multitudes who to-day are surrounded with the sad emblems of sorrow, were to have been arrayed in the garments of praise. The bells that are tolling out their deep notes, responsive to the deeper sorrows of the people were to have rung out their merriest peals, in unison with the bounding joy, inspired in all hearts by the prospect of an immediate peace. But "the joy of our heart is ceased: our dance is turned into mourning." The heart of the whole nation swells with the same emotion. One great sorrow, which for the time being swallows up all other interests, spreads its dark shadow over all the land—clouds and darkness obscure our social and political heavens—a sabbath-like stillness reigns almost unbroken in our business marts; and the strong men who are wont to crowd these marts sit alone and weep. Why all this? Why is the joy of our heart ceased? What

(*) This day was originally set apart by the Governor of the State as a day of thanksgiving.

is it that has so suddenly turned our dance into mourning? Do the reasons for rejoicing no longer exist? Are the prospects of an immediate peace in any wise dimmed? Is the rebellion any more formidable than when we were stringing our harps to the notes of praise? Nay, my hearers; the banner of victory is still borne onward by our conquering legions. The citidal of the conspirators against our national existence is patrolled by union soldiers. The confederacy of treason is broken in pieces. Its armies are utterly destroyed. The flag of the union is everywhere triumphant, and the arch traitors are fugitives from the avenging arm of justice. Every day adds new triumphs to our past victories. Every day brings tidings which in other times would light up all faces with gladness. But now the joy of our heart is ceased. We almost forget that General Grant scarcely more than a fortnight since captured the city of Richmond and received the surrender of General Lee and his well appointed army. We read in bold capitals that Mobile has fallen, but these bold capitals are less stirring than the long black heavy lines by which they are surrounded. The triumphant march of the irresistible Sherman, driving the last army of the Confederates before him, and utterly blotting out the last hope of treason, is received without any public demonstrations. No bells are rung, no bonfires are lighted. The flags of the Union are indeed hung out to the breeze, but they look sad with their heavy weeds of mourning. The streets mourn, the houses mourn, the whole Nation mourns as it has never mourned before; and all this, when there are such reasons for joy. The darkness for the hour seems more than the light. The one great affliction has dimmed our eyes to the many great blessings. It outweighs all others. It has fallen with crushing weight. It has fallen on every

part of the land. Our wise, pure-minded, patriotic and generous President has fallen—has fallen by the hand of the cowardly assassin—in an unexpected moment, and at a most critical period in our history. The greatness of the National calamity weighs down all hearts. We feel that the stroke that extinguished his valuable life, has felled us to the ground. We are bewildered—we stagger with the blow—our speech is broken. “The joy of our heart is ceased.” No sweet music cheers it, no glad tidings awakes it to joy. In truth, my hearers, there never has occurred since we became a Nation, an event of greater magnitude. There never before has been an occasion when matters of a profound public interest were so blended and mixed up with feelings of sadness and anxiety—though just now it is altogether an affair of the heart; and for the moment all party contention and clamor are hushed and merged into one common and overwhelming sensibility. Oh how it tends to quiet the agitations of every public interest when Death steps in and demonstrates the littleness and insignificance of all that men are toiling for; when as if to make known the greatness of his power in the sight of the whole country, he stalks in ghastly triumph over the highest seats of office and power, and singles out the one on whom especially are suspended the hopes of a great Nation! A few days ago all looked so full of life—so full of cheerfulness. Tidings of the most hopeful character were flashing in all directions over the wires. The country was preparing to give expression to loud anthems of praise to the Ruler of the Universe for his signal favor to us as a Nation. The embassy of gladness had travelled over the land, and the country forgetful of all she had suffered during the past afflictive years—was about to offer the spectacle of one wide and rejoicing

jubilee. Yet why should this event, the destruction of one life, sad and heart-rending and horrible as it is, produce such a wide spread feeling of sorrow? Thousands have perished in the great struggle for the life of the Republic, and the land has been drenched with blood; why let our joys be turned into mourning at the death of one?

Is it that the assassination of our cherished and noble President will seriously imperil any substantial interest of the country? I do not believe it. The times are indeed peculiar so far as we are concerned. They teem with interests of vast moment—interests which call for the exercise of the most matured statesmanship. The problems to be solved, are, if possible, more difficult of solution, than those which have occupied so much of the attention of the country in the past. The questions connected with peace are likely to be more perplexing than those pertaining to war, and to call forth a diversity of sentiment and opinion which might tax all the good, sound common sense of our lamented Chief. All revolutions, whether political or religious, are prolific in extreme opinions and extreme measures. In the reformation of the sixteenth century the tide of opinion rolled on so rapidly and resistlessly as almost to sweep away the land marks of truth and righteousness. The Remonstrants carried matters to such an extreme as to place in peril all that was accomplished by the wiser and more moderate actors in that important drama. That there should be extreme opinions and the advocacy of extreme measures, growing out of our past and present troubles, were no matters for marvel. It may therefore be regarded as especially calamitous, that at this time, the Chief Magistrate of the Nation, characterized eminently by moderation in counsel and moderation in action, should be so ruthlessly snatched away. The Nation knew him;

it had faith in his judgment, and in his ability, under God, to bring it safely out of all its difficulties. He was the man for the times.

Yet whatever may be our first impressions connected with this terrible outrage on civilization and humanity, it must be obvious to all thoughtful observers, that no one life, however precious, is essential to the well-being of the Nation, and that no serious damage can arise out of this most terrible of National afflictions, so far as the existence and stability of the Republic are concerned. The elements of strength and prosperity all remain, and however much we may give the preference to the long tried and faithful servant, so sadly removed from our midst, we have yet not the slightest doubt that the same kind Providence which has so manifestly watched over us as a Nation, during the progress of the great conflict with treason and oppression, will provide the needful instruments to work out the high destiny that awaits the American Nation. If ever any people had reason to say it, we have in a most emphatic manner : “ God is our refuge and strength ; a very present help in trouble : therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” In our darkest hours, He has caused the light to shine. In our greatest straits, He has brought deliverance ; and in the present as well as in the past, there is everything to assure us that He will, by raising up the proper agency, bring us out of all our troubles and make us a praise in the earth.

To my mind it is as clear as if written with a pencil of light on the firmament of heaven, that as a Nation, instead of being weakened or coming to a stand, we have taken out a new lease on existence. As is sometimes the case, one disease throws off another which was threat-

ening the life of the patient ; so we in our life struggle have thrown off the cancerous affection which was preying on the very vitals of the body politic. We were wont in other times, to think differently. We looked upon the Nation as a young giant, full of life and vigor, capable of any endurance and strong enough to throw off any attack, and consequently we regarded slavery as nothing more than an ugly ulcer on one of its limbs, which could never imperil the system ; and which might in time be thrown off by the strong constitution of the patient. So we thought, and so we declaimed. We spun out fine theories and whistled ourselves out of all idea of danger. But the ulcer spread. The day of danger came at length, and happily there was vitality enough for the great crisis. Life prevailed over death. The deadly disease has been thrown off, and the life of the Nation not only saved but thoroughly regenerated. With the Rebellion is ended this monstrous system of iniquity which was the great black spot on the sun of our Nationality, the disgrace and shame of our National profession, the dark spirit which instigated all our troubles, which has caused our land to flow with rivers of blood, which has enacted the most atrocious barbarism of the nineteenth century, and which has now, last of all, covered the Nation with sackcloth by assassinating the Chief Citizen of the Realm. Amidst the sorrows of this hour and the solemnities of this day, I thank God that the clanking of the chain-gangs will never more be heard in our land, and that our eyes shall nevermore see what has so often been witnessed in our Southern States—human beings, handcuffed and chained together two and two, and crowded together like cattle in a filthy car, so conscious of their degradation that they would not look you in the face, and for no other crime than that their skins were black !

But the end has come and with it a new life to the Nation, and indemnity beyond doubt, against the machinations of conspiracy and treason. No ; however deep our sorrows to-day, it is not from any fear that the Nation will not move steadily onward in everything that contributes to National renown.

Is it from any fear that this dark deed of expiring treason will in any wise bring damage to us in our relations with Foreign Nations—that as a people we are bowed down to-day? It may be questioned whether at any former period in our history, we have commanded a higher degree of respect among Foreign Courts than we do at this present moment. However the opinion may have been entertained and perhaps cherished, that our experiment of Free Government must, when subjected to such a trial as it has faced for the last four years, prove a failure, that opinion to-day has very few advocates. And the manner in which the Nation has met the grand crisis of its existence and weathered the storm, will compel the respect of the most reluctant. A war unparalleled in its magnitude, waged with a most desperate and unscrupulous enemy, involving an expenditure of countless millions, yet carried on without borrowing from other nations a single dollar, or asking for a single man, is an exhibition of National power and of National resources which must command the respect of the whole world. Such energy is without a parallel ; and as well by our own consciousness of strength as by the manifestation of it in effecting what the leading European nations predicted could not be done, we have most effectually placed ourselves beyond and above any danger from the interference of any foreign power. Nay ; our rapid triumphs have carried us beyond this point of danger—they have placed us on such vantage ground that those Foreign

States who were so short-sighted as to trench on the rights of National hospitality in the days of our adversity, will no doubt be swift to make the *amende honorable* when they learn that the Confederacy of treason is no more. No ; in the cup of our sorrow to-day, there is no such ingredient as this. With victorious armies led on by the first generals of this or any age—with an unequalled navy, a restored Union and the smiles of a benign Providence, no considerations of this kind could evoke the utterance: “The joy of our heart is ceased.” It is in the midst of our strength that we are bowed down. It is in the hour when we have no fears to quell that our eyes are suffused with tears. It is just at the moment when the dark cloud which has so long overshadowed us is beginning to break, that this horror of darkness is upon us. No ; not in these nor in any of the possibilities which a timorous nature might suggest, is to be discovered the cause of this loud and prolonged wail of an afflicted Nation.

The joy of our heart is ceased because of the great calamity that has fallen on the Nation—this and this alone. Our President, whom we have learned to love and honor, has fallen by an assassin’s hand. Under any circumstances the death of the Chief Magistrate of the Nation is a startling event. When he dies in the bosom of friendship, attended by the ministry of love and affection, the deep sympathy of the public is aroused. But such a death—the extinguishing of such a life by such a hand, fills the mind with horror. Words are impotent to characterize the deed. There are men of bad passions everywhere. There are adventurers in every society, who for the sake of gain are ready to waylay the unprotected ; but the spirit developed in the assassin, who for sentiment or revenge, can thus at a blow cover a Nation with sorrow,

could originate only in connection with that civilization which could systematically starve to death thousands of helpless and defenceless men to gratify a fiendish hate. That such an event should occur in a Christian land in the nineteenth century, under the very tree of Liberty, is a nameless horror; yet it has passed into history, never to be expunged—to go down to the remotest ages as the blackest crime of a rebellion that has not a solitary mitigation. It is to stand pre-eminent among all the devilish and frightful tragedies of the darkest periods of the world's existence—without a parallel in the annals of crime. The history of ancient Rome, disfigured as it is by violence and crime, presents no spot so dark as that which must throughout all time pollute the annals of our American Republic. In the first century of the Christian era, Caligula, a monster of iniquity—a disgrace to humanity—the man who gave utterance to the wish that the whole Roman people had but one neck, that he might destroy them at a single blow—fell by the weapon of the assassin, and no tear was shed over his grave. Domitian, another wretch of the same century, was struck down by a company of conspirators, among whom was his own wife. In the second and third centuries, it became the prevailing fashion of the country to put to death by violence the rulers who became offensive to the soldiers. In the course of fifty years from the death of Alexander Severus, there are reckoned more than fifty Cæsars, who with that title, lawful or unlawful, made their appearance to contend for the imperial throne. Proclaimed and then murdered by their soldiers, they were the sport of fate and cruelty. As there was nothing of virtue in their lives to render their memory immortal, so there was nothing of loss in their death to render them lamented. English history is comparatively free

from such stains so far as the rulers of the land are concerned. Edward the 2d, Richard the 3d, and Edward the 5th, were the victims of the assassin's hand ; but the first two were weak and utterly unfit to wield the sceptre of power, and the last was a mere child, who perished at the age of twelve years. There have been numerous attempts on the life of the reigning sovereigns, but without success. In the history of modern France, while legal murders have been frequent enough, there are but few instances of assassination. Henry the 3d, a weak and worthless prince, fell by the hand of lawless violence, unwept ; while Henry the 4th, perhaps the noblest prince that ever sat on the French throne, was mourned by the whole nation. But the assassin was a fanatical adventurer, from whose mind reason was partially dethroned, and who, when he had accomplished the deed, stood up with the boldness of a hero and confessed the crime. Yet this has hitherto stood out as perhaps the most prominent instance where a good and wise Ruler has fallen by this inhuman crime. But even this furnishes no parallel to that which brings us before God, as suppliants, to-day. The conspirators, who plotted this most diabolical crime, and the assassin who carried it into execution, had neither the apology of insanity nor the manliness of the maniac. They constitute but a part and parcel of the gigantic conspiracy against the Nation's life, and are animated with the heroism of cowards. They have made themselves pre-eminent in infamy, leaving all their confreres in sin so far behind, that no parallel will ever be found, and their names will go down to posterity as the synonym of all that is horrid and satanic in human action. Indeed it may be doubted whether the human mind in its most depraved state is capable of conceiving even of a more damnable crime against humanity, and

certainly humanity could under no possible circumstances suffer a more frightful outrage. We stand aghast at the insane madness and fiendishness of the act—unparalleled in infamy, it is unequalled in folly. If the evil genius of treason had been inspired by the very Prince of liars and deceivers, it could not have perpetrated a more suicidal act. It has stricken down at a blow the only man who could or would have lightened the retribution that awaits the high handed transgressors of rebellion. It has not only made treason ten-fold more odious, but it has placed the least expression of sympathy with the rebellion at a perilous discount. With the exception of a few silly people, too few to be of consequence, too silly to command any respect, it has united the whole North in one common burst of indignation and sorrow, irrespective of all party lines, and at the same time evoked such an expression of sympathy for the existing Administration as to make it stronger than at any period during the last four years. Was there ever such a crime perpetrated with so little motive, nay in the face of such strong motives? Has the old serpent lost his cunning? Has treason bereft its minions of all thought and consideration?

But while over this gigantic crime which must to the latest generation disgrace the annals of our country, we are sad to-day—sad that such a concentration of wickedness could by any means find existence under the shadow of our free institutions and in the light of our American Christianity: most of all is the joy of our heart ceased because the hand of the assassin has torn from us our good much loved President. We have been called in the Providence of God, since we took our place among the nations of the earth to mourn the loss by death of two acting Presidents. They passed away from their high places of honor and trust, with quiet sorrow to

the house appointed for all living. No such tumultuous sorrow has ever before agitated the Nation's heart. The respect paid to the honored dead has been formal, marked by little emotion ; but now the very fountains of sorrow are broken up. The loved and trusted one of the Nation is taken from us. The one we have tried and proved is gone and we are compelled to accept a change—when of all times we wanted no change, not even for a greater or a more polished ruler. We have had Presidents of greater abilities, men of more polish, of higher literary attainments, of more personal graces, but we have had none more patriotic, none more wise or with a better balanced character than our lamented chief who to-day is decked out for the grave. And when the fires of party spirit are extinguished and the fumes of passion and prejudice are cleared away, and his character is viewed in the clear light of impartial history, patriotism and humanity will cover his tomb with imperishable honors. His memory will be held in respect so long as the spirit of patriotism swells the American heart, and his name will be enrolled among the benefactors of mankind when human bondage is remembered only as a thing of the past.

It is possible that so far as President LINCOLN is concerned, he has passed away at the most propitious hour for his fame. He had entered on his administration amidst the most imposing difficulties. A most formidable rebellion was fully organized. He was waylaid on his approach to the Capital by assassins. He found, on his arrival, the Government almost in a state of dissolution. The treasury was bankrupt ; a few millions of dollars had been borrowed by the retiring administration to meet the exigencies of the hour at enormously ruinous rates of interest. He manfully faced the difficulties

of his place. His courage did not fail him in the darkest days of his administration. He gradually overcame all obstacles—saw the credit of the government established and its arms victorious over the hosts of the rebellion. He was mercifully spared by a kind Providence to see the conspiracy of treason overthrown—its capital in the possession of the Union and its chief army with its officers prisoners of war. At this hour of triumph, at the highest point of his official glory, with his mind filled with the noblest and most generous purposes towards a fallen foe and for the pacification of the country, he is cut down. His sun is at the very zenith; an established peace would be but the rounding off of his glory. It would scarcely give him a higher place in the memory of his countryman. He dies a martyr to Liberty in the very hour of its triumph over treason and oppression. But all this does not mitigate our sorrow. With all the glory that gathers around his immortal name, the joy of our heart is ceased. We feel as if the blow had fallen in our own home circle, and that the one on whom we most trusted is suddenly snatched away from us. The universal sentiment is one of the warmest attachment. He who lies cold in death approached, so far as this sentiment is concerned, as near as possible to the place occupied by the Father of our Country. We leave that noble character without any parallel. Let him who was “first in war and first in peace” ever stand “first in the hearts of his countrymen.” But next to the name of GEORGE WASHINGTON let the name of him who lived so devotedly for his country, who so unselfishly and untiringly sought its highest good, who so manfully and wisely led us in the darkest years of our history, and whose pure character and noble deeds command the admiration of this and other Na-

tions, have the next place in the hearts of a grateful people. It is because of this loved and departed goodness that we mourn to-day. We sorrow because we shall no more sit under his wise rule. He has passed, O, how suddenly, from our sight! All that is mortal of President LINCOLN is on its way to the tomb ; but his life will ever live. Farewell thou true and noble spirit. The stormy sea of life is passed. Peaceful be thy rest, blissful thy repose. We will never forget thy troubled life or thy martyr death. Thy name shall live while memory endures, and at thy shrine and over thy mouldering ashes will a grateful Nation swear eternal hatred to treason and oppression.

In drawing these reflections to a close, I cannot forbear to call the attention of the audience to two points of great practical importance just now made especially conspicuous by the solemnities of this day, the first of very general application, the second more particularly appeals to the young men of the country.

It is not impossible that many, instead of remembering the lesson of moderation so forcibly taught by the character of our lamented Chief Magistrate, may feel that they are called by his violent death to swear vengeance against the entire South, from which this foul spirit emanated. It is easy to see how this result is likely to take place in view of the terrible tragedy of Friday last. But yesterday the most generous sentiments were advocated. The recent victories of our arms had called out a spirit of leniency which was pleading for a general amnesty and pardon for all but the most guilty ; and now nothing is more probable than that under the influence of the strong feeling of wrong and indignation now existing, the feeling of compassion for a conquered enemy should pass over into the feeling of revenge for

an irreparable injury. Were such to be the case it would be but an additional national calamity. The South is in no wise changed in its character by this act ; and however bad, however far from what we regard the civilization of Christianity, we can not afford to imitate their conduct. We did not yield to the strong provocation offered by the barbarous treatment to which they subjected our helpless soldiers in their hands, to avenge the injury by perpetrating a like barbarism on their imprisoned men ; we could not do it—we were never slave-drivers—we were not accustomed to see men and women tortured and maltreated ; and I trust the time will never come when as a Nation we shall be left to forget that we are Christians, and as such bound to respect the utterances of Him who says : “ Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” It has always seemed that our lamented President was over lenient in his treatment of wicked men, but we shall always revere his memory for this noble, humane trait of his character. It is manlike to take vengeance ; it is godlike to forgive.

The other point to which I call attention, and especially the attention of young men, is this, viz : that goodness is the one trait of character which has secured for the memory of President LINCOLN this wide-spread and heartfelt manifestation of respect. If success in a good and righteous cause be the criterion of greatness, then was ABRAHAM LINCOLN a great man, but his greatness was inseparable from his goodness, without which he would have had no superiority over his fellows. His incorruptible honesty and integrity secured to him the confidence of the nation, and all felt that his mistakes, whatever they might be, were those of a true hearted patriot and lover of his fellow-men. Nor does there remain one

act of his life to cast the shadow of doubt on this feature of his character.

And now, by all that is lamentable in his death, by the sorrows, the deep heartfelt sorrows of a great Nation ; by these emblems of mourning ; by this widespread manifestation of respect, are the young men of the Nation entreated to make first of all rectitude of character the high aim of life. An elevated grade of intellect, a widely extended acquaintance with science and literature may not be within the reach of many, but this is within the reach of all. Every young man may by the possession of this secure the unlimited respect of all who know him. I do not doubt that one of the designs of Providence connected with this great National sorrow is to impress, more effectually than it could be by his life, upon the minds of young men the example of his eminent devotion to this one thing. And while the name of his assassin should forever cover with such disgrace and shame the slums of vice and the highways of iniquity as to frighten away every young man as from the very portals of hell itself, the name of ABRAHAM LINCOLN will throughout all time furnish an inspiration for good and noble living. And as often as the Nation sorrowing bends over his tomb or writes his name in the high places of the land on imperishable marble, it will proclaim afresh to the young men of the country that the way not simply to the high places of power and honor, but to the warmest place in its affections, is through unimpeachable honesty and undoubted goodness. Let our earnest prayer be that his spirit may revive in the hearts of his countrymen as they shed to-day the heartfelt tear over his ashes.

71.2009.084.05229

